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EUR/NCE FOR ERIC FICHTE; WHA/CCA

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TAGS: PREL KDEM CU EZ

SUBJECT: CZECHS SUPPORT CUBA DEMOCRACY FUND; SEARCH FOR
WAYS TO COOPERATE ON CUBA

REF: A. 2005 PRAGUE 1560

1B. PRAGUE 0504

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Counselor
Karen C. Reider for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Gretchen Birkle, DRL/FO Senior Coordinator for Global Democracy Strategies, and Paul Bonicelli, USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, met with Czech MFA officials and Czech NGO representatives April 10. They discussed the proposed International Cuba Democracy Fund ("Cuba Fund") (ref A), and opportunities for joint cooperation on Cuba and Latin America generally. The Czech MFA reiterated its support for the Cuba Fund, and the Czech NGO International Committee on Cuban Democracy (ICDC) proposed to serve as the Fund's secretariat. End summary.

12. (C) On April 10, 2006, Gretchen Birkle and Paul Bonicelli met with Gabriela Dlouha, Director of the Czech MFA's Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS); Igor Blazevic, Director of Human Rights for Czech NGO People in Need (PIN); and Jakub Hladik, assistant to former Czech President Vaclav Havel and representative of the ICDC. Birkle and Bonicelli also attended a panel discussion on Cuba arranged by the Embassy. Panelists included Caleb McCarry, the State Department's Cuba Transition Coordinator (from Washington by video conference); Jakub Skalnik, the Czech MFA's Director of the Americas Department; and Igor Blazevic, of PIN.

TRANS-PIN Cooperation on Cuba

13. (C) Gabriela Dlouha, Director of the Transformation Cooperation Unit (TRANS), explained the MFA relies primarily on PIN to promote democracy and provide humanitarian aid in Cuba. (Note: TRANS provides grants to NGOs such as PIN, who in turn promote democracy and human rights in "priority" countries identified by the Czech MFA, including Cuba, Belarus, and Iraq. According to Dlouha, the MFA may add Venezuela and other countries to the list of priority countries in the future. End note). Dlouha said PIN is a reliable partner for "on-island" programs because PIN has extensive experience and success working in Cuba. PIN also cooperates with the MFA in less-traditional ways. For example, the MFA, PIN, and the ICDC co-hosted a conference on Cuba in Prague on April 25-26 (ref B). Attendees included European NGOs working in Cuba, and MFA officials from Spain, Poland, and Slovakia. The goal of the conference was two-fold: (1) provide a private forum where Czech and Spanish

officials could identify common ground on which to base a new EU common position, and (2) encourage European NGOs to share best practices in support of the democratic opposition, and to share their experience with MFA officials.

The International Cuba Democracy Fund

14. (C) Dlouha reiterated Czech support for the proposed Cuba Fund. She said it may build political consensus among contributors (preferably the U.S., Latin American countries, and EU member states), and hopefully strengthen the will of the EU collectively to change conditions in Cuba. In Dlouha's view, the political impact of the fund is more important than the amount of money contributed to it. (She also noted the need for an institutional European democracy fund to support the work of NGOs in closed countries.)

15. (C) In a separate meeting, Igor Blazevic, Director of PIN and advisor to the ICDC, said the ICDC proposes to serve as the secretariat of the Cuba Fund. According to Blazevic, the ICDC proposal is as follows:

--- ICDC would provide a small staff to manage the Fund, e.g., an executive director, a grant manager, and an accountant to control finances. The staff would be composed of current and former PIN employees.

--- A board of directors would be formed. Directors could be representatives of contributing countries, NGO institutions, and/or members of the ICDC (members are international luminaries, such as former President Vaclav Havel, who have the ability to shape public opinion). The board would determine over-arching policy goals and funding priorities.

--- The ICDC recommends that the Fund should support: (1) on-island projects that are implemented, at least partially, with the support of civil society in Cuba; (2) programs that raise support for Cuban democracy in Latin American countries; and (3) programs that encourage regional and international dialogue focused on "shaping the approach" to the Castro regime. (The ICDC believes it would be best if the Fund was not used to support scholarly research, academic fellowships and scholarships, humanitarian aid, refugees, micro-finance schemes, business development, or the sciences.)

16. (C) Birkle said the Department is in the process of sourcing money that can be earmarked for the Cuba Fund. Blazevic said the ICDC is prepared to form the legal organization for the Fund, and can provide concrete terms about its services as the secretariat if Washington signals interest in proceeding.

Areas of Possible Future Cooperation

17. (C) The Czechs remain enthusiastic and committed partners on Cuba. In the course of the meetings with Birkle and Bonicelli, the following areas of possible cooperation were identified as worthy of further discussion:

--- PIN could offer its on-island expertise to monitor DRL projects in Cuba, or develop programs for DRL focused on assisting women or youth in Cuba.

--- The Czechs could provide a briefing on Czech lessons learned that may be useful for AID/DRL project planning (e.g., advise on handling sensitive privatization issues.)

--- The Czechs and the USG could co-sponsor a low-profile conference for Cuban exile groups to help them explore common ground and possibly broker a coalition.

--- U.S. congressional representatives could form delegations with Czech MPs to travel to Latin America to discuss democracy and the Czech experience with their counterparts

(Dlouha expressed strong interest in this possibility).

¶8. (U) This cable has been cleared by Gretchen Birkle and

Paul Bonicelli.

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